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THE

Methodical Physician.

BEING THE CLOSING LECTURE OF THE COURSE  
UPON OBSTETRICS, ETC., IN HAHNE-  
MANN MEDICAL COLLEGE.

SESSION 1864-5.

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BY R. LUDLAM, M. D.,

Professor of Obstetrics, and the Diseases of Women and Children.

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CHICAGO :

C. S. HALSEY, PHARMACEUTIST.

1865

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## ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN:

Method is a personal quality. Success, in its broadest sense, is impossible without it. The fields of observation and of opportunity are fertile and extensive. The time which is allotted for their cultivation is brief and transient. In order to reap a harvest of gain to the race, society arranges its objects and purposes systematically. Her machinery must run in an orderly manner. The springs of its action are the rules which regulate the details of duty amongst men. These rules are laid in the principles of right and justice, and conscience keeps the tally of their fulfilment.

In bringing this course of Lectures to a close, it is appropriate for me to offer some words of counsel upon the plan of professional life which promises the largest measure of success. To those of you whose term of pupilage is passed, as well as to those who labor in patience for the

coveted parchment, I shall speak soberly and candidly.

No one doubts that a special class of moral virtues is requisite in the physician. The rules which are to regulate his conduct in society are fixed and unvarying. But the method whereby he is to succeed in the realization of the greatest good to his patients, his profession and himself, is not so determinate. It varies with circumstances and contingencies. The motive which underlies the impulse to effort, the means at command, and the reward looked for, will modify the plan of action to suit each individual case.

The comprehensive and thorough course of instruction which you have enjoyed and improved has doubtless suggested the scope of research and the extent of information which it will be necessary for you to explore and acquire. Even as students, it will be impossible for you to succeed unless you are methodical. Diligence will enable you to accumulate much that is valuable. Tact is not the equivalent of toil. The omnivorous reader may possess a mental appetite which exceeds his power of assimilation. The functional activity of the brain, like that of the stomach, will become deranged if one thrusts too many



kinds of aliment upon it irrespective of time and propriety. The development of thought, like that of tissue, may suffer from an excess, as well as from a deficiency of organizable material. It is as pernicious to over-read as it is to over-eat. The most healthy, happy, and useful members of society take their meals regularly, and in respect of diet, prefer a plain but systematic course of living. They are the best students whose habits of application are methodical and thorough, rather than greedy and capricious.

It is doubtful if, having listened to the same lectures, any two members of this class have noted the same facts in precisely the same manner. Each has his own method of fixing these facts in his mind, in order that they may be available. To this end association, memory, the repeated examinations of your flourishing *Institute*, and the tact which recognizes a harmony of the sciences collateral to Medicine, have been brought into requisition. My own eye has frequently detected the pencil busy in sketching a skeleton of the lecture that may outlive the speaker and the writer. So you will bye-and-bye discover that the plan of study which has been adopted by your professional neighbors

and friends, like that of your fellow-students in College, bears the impress of individuality.

One physician, engaged in active practice, prefers to appropriate his evenings to his books. He works all the day, and reads at night. The narrow margin of leisure comes at the close of the day's toil and anxiety. He devotes its moments as economically as possible, and must be recognized as a faithful steward. But this plan of study is objectionable. If his field of duty is large and laborious, and especially if he encounters the wear-and-tear of a "country ride," he will be too weary when night comes to enjoy and to digest what he reads. His mind has been tried and perplexed with the experiences of the day; his bodily person fatigued by a draught upon his physical resources.

Under these circumstances, he is in need of rest and relaxation,—not more of labor, but less of it. The cozy slippers, the cheerful hearthstone, the social atmosphere, invite to repose, enjoyment and diversion. These surroundings are not suited to scientific investigation and analysis. If he shuts himself up to his books, he is more likely to sleep than to study. If he attempts to write an article for a medical journal, his ideas flow scantily, and his style is so obscure

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that he may be said to resemble the cuttle-fish by hiding himself in his own ink! If he tones up the nervous centres with a temporary stimulus, his paper may not be readable, reliable, or acceptable to the profession generally. We do not place witnesses at court under the influence of chloroform, alcohol or opium, before hearing their testimony.

Another is more fitful in his efforts at self-improvement. He "never reads unless he feels disposed," has no set period for this duty, and consequently accomplishes but little in the direction indicated. His library is lean and antiquated. His books are miscellaneous, shabby, mute and second-hand. His instruments, like the plow of the thriftless farmer, may be found where he used them last. His remedies are in a rickety old chest, or drawer, dusty, neglected and unreliable. The margin of his time is wasted upon some frivolous pursuit or gratification. Perhaps he is more deeply interested in lots and leases than in literature. He repudiates the medical periodicals, and speaks sneeringly of those who write for them and read them. He trifles away the golden moments of opportunity, and abounds in apology for neglect of duty, or for failing to meet an engagement. From his



lack of zeal and of method, many an one goes down to that grave whose head-stone is as silent as if beneath the ocean upon the cause of this calamity.

A third rises early and appropriates the best portion of the day to the culture of his mind. This he deems an essential condition to happiness and usefulness. At such a time he is not so liable to interruption, and his mental faculties are active and vigorous. His mind is clear, his perception acute, and his physical energies have been refreshed by sleep. He can accomplish more in one hour in the morning than he could possibly effect in two hours in the evening. By this means he will be enabled during the day the more thoroughly to digest what he has read. He tests the author's conclusions, and if found reliable, incorporates them into his own clinical experience. What he writes is sensible, suggestive, perspicuous and practical. Beginning the day thus promptly and properly, he fills his appointments with other physicians, in case of counsel, and with his private patients always. They learn to depend upon his word. A fondness for method characterizes all his movements. Should he resolve to set apart a later period of the day to the capital duty of



study, an excess of business, the contingencies of travel, or detention by serious illness, might interfere with and thwart his design. Now he secures the appropriate and propitious moment. By so doing, the initiative is taken, and a great end is gained.

The plan of reading which I apprehend is the more profitable for the medical student during his pupilage, is the following: Let him take two branches at a time, reading one in the morning, and the other in the afternoon. He should not read at night. These two branches should have as close a relation to each other as possible. Thus, Anatomy and Physiology afford the structural and functional history of an organ or apparatus. If he studied the anatomy of the lungs this morning, let him turn, while the subject is still fresh in his mind, to the physiology of respiration this afternoon; or if he dissected the heart, with Gray, before dinner, let him reflect with Dalton before tea, upon its sounds, its movements and its impulse. The practice and Materia Medica may be read in like manner, and Surgery and Obstetrics will be better appreciated as he progresses. Two of these branches may be *studied* six hours daily—not more—for one month, and then exchanged for others.

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This will add something by way of variety, and serve to maintain a degree of interest that will be profitable. To those of you who have not settled upon any especial method in this particular, you will permit me to commend that which I have adopted for the use of my own private pupils.

The earnest physician reads more at length. He prefers a systematic treatise, a practical monograph, or a carefully-written review. He has his books of reference, but his reading is not limited to their consultation, any more than to that of his lexicon. He does not browse upon authors indiscriminately, but selects those which are reliable and fruitful in resource. I recommend those before me, who are about to launch upon the sea of individual experience, as physicians, not to omit the careful and systematic reading of the standard authorities in Medicine.

Generally speaking, you should prefer the best part of the day for earnest and successful study. Office-hours are indispensable. Always arrange for and keep one or two office-hours in the morning. By this means you will secure a measure of time to your own improvement, and also be enabled to methodize the labors of the day. Give your patients to understand that, in

order to see you personally, or to secure an early call upon one who is ill, they should come to your office, and the message must be left within a specified time. This plan renders it possible to make a greater number of visits with less fatigue and more promptness than any other. You can arrange the route beforehand, and will not be obliged to travel over the same ground so many times during the day. A little head-work may save great toil and vexation. If you have an intelligent class of "parishioners" to begin with, all this can be easily managed. They will soon fall into an arrangement which secures so many mutual advantages. I recommend it as a means of making them considerate. A physician is expected to be "as indefatigable as a mill-stream, that runs even on holidays," but he should be the master, and not the servant of his business. It is no excuse for excess of night or Sunday riding, that the farmer's horse must do a full day's work before the doctor can be sent for. Except in case of emergency, these people have no more right to insist upon your toiling at night, in preference to the day-time, than they have to take the Lord's time instead of their own in which to go for you. In all



ordinary illness the physician's convenience should be consulted. While it would be wrong for him to permit his mind to be distracted with pursuits which are foreign to his proper calling; while he should be ever ready to afford a coveted relief, yet his own feelings and frailties, and his own humanity are parties to the contract, when he engages to take the professional care of a patient.

You may depend upon it, gentlemen, that, when you hear a physician complain of having no margin of leisure for keeping himself *au courant* with the profession; that he can never find time to read a magazine or to write for one; to attend a medical society, or to look in upon one of our colleges occasionally, in order to show his good-will and interest therein, the fault is not to be attributed to excess of professional care and responsibility, but to a lack of disposition or of method on his part. In case his field of practice is limited to a town or city, this plea is especially absurd. We do not estimate the value or merit of a piece of machinery by the noise it makes, but by the quality of the article which is manufactured by it. Those physicians who make the greatest ado over the smallest labor may be said to embody the Scotchman's idea of

steam—"a bucket of water in a tremendous perspiration!"

It will be in your power so to provide against the contingencies incident to disease as to save yourselves a considerable share of "night-work." This is always desirable. The daily exacerbations of fever, which generally come on at evening and during the night, may be anticipated, and their symptoms provided for. You will take the precaution to explain to the nurse and friends that this is the natural and necessary order of things. It may, perhaps, be well to leave a remedy that is designed especially for the paroxysm, the use of which is to be suspended, when it has passed away.

Suppose the children in the family are predisposed to the croup. Nothing is easier than for you to supply the parents with its palliative and antidote. Give them to understand that, in this hereditary or catarrhal form, the disease is more alarming than serious; that the paroxysm generally yields soon after midnight; and that they need not be frightened if the attack is repeated for three several nights in succession. These bits of information may cost you an occasional fee, but they will economize your strength, and indirectly increase your resources by per-

mitting you to rest through many of the darkest and most disagreeable nights in the year. Such providence will do more than you can imagine to ground you in the confidence of the home-circle.

There is much of hygienic information, which, as conservators of the public health, it will become your duty to impart and apply. Never fear lest community should know too much of the laws of health, but contribute your mite towards its enlightenment. The more men know of their own physical organization and susceptibilities, the better will they appreciate you, if you are intelligent. On the part of a legal adviser it may require even more of tact and talent to prevent, than to prosecute a suit at law. An enlightened and appreciative community would set its seal of approval upon the former in preference to the latter. You will gain as much credit through your efforts to keep society at par in point of health, as by the endeavor to dislodge disease when its fangs are already fastened.

There are other characteristics of the methodical physician. He is patient. This cardinal virtue is especially to be cultivated by the young men in the profession. We Americans have a



suicidal mania for haste and dispatch. The student precipitates himself into the full-tide of an extensive practice with undue precaution and deliberation. Having scarcely enrolled his name as a pupil, he desires to be thought a practitioner. Like the wasp, he is largest and most important on making his *début*. This species of hot-house development is not the most healthy and hardy. There is need of more of that kind of culture which exposes us to the wind, as well as to the sun's light and warmth, in order that our roots may strike more deeply and firmly into the soil of experience.

"Not yet—the aloe waits serene  
Its promised advent hour;  
A patient century of green  
To one full, perfect flower."

As a rule, I am of opinion that physicians are in the habit of visiting their patients more frequently than is necessary or profitable. This is especially true of those who practice in our cities and larger towns. The cause of this is two-fold; *First* the very natural anxiety of the family and friends, and *Secondly* the nearness of residence, and the ease with which the Doctor can be summoned at any moment. With some physicians it amounts to a propensity. Its consequences are prejudicial to the welfare of the patient in

that it places a strong temptation to change of remedies which have already been chosen, and in the use of which one should have persisted. There are few of us who, under these circumstances, are not liable to vacillate and to modify our plan of treatment to meet a fancied emergency. Patients who are ill with typhoid fever, or dysentery, for example, away in the country so remote from your office that it is impossible to see them more than once in two, four or six days usually make a better and a more rapid recovery than if they lived next door and you had visited them several times a day. This fact is not altogether due to country air, and the more vigorous constitution of the patient. The careful choice of remedies in the outset, and their persistent use is a principal means of explaining this very noticeable result.

It is true that certain diseases are in their nature so capricious and changeable, and their symptoms so variable as to necessitate more careful watching on your part, and frequent modifications in the previous plan of treatment. But these cases are exceptions to the general rule, and are usually less grave and serious in proportion to the trouble which they occasion, than some others. A little tact and discernment

will enable you to adjust this whole question of the necessity and propriety of visiting your patients more or less frequently. It would be very absurd, as indeed very wrong in you to make the same number of calls upon all cases indiscriminately.

While, therefore it would be criminal to neglect your patients, and not to see them as often as the urgency of their symptoms or the severity of their suffering requires and prompts, it is positively harmful to a mutual interest to permit yourself to make unnecessary visits. Your time is valuable and should not be thrown away. There is no fee that will compensate for such folly. Moreover the temporary gain which accrues from extra-professional intercourse and gossip is neither salutary nor desirable. One may be social without being common-place. An excess of familiarity saps the foundations of confidence in many physicians. To be social, manly, charitable and considerate, is your duty and privilege. To be prodigal of your time and talents, to waste them upon frivolous pursuits, or pleasures, is to subtract so much from your professional culture and self-respect, and so much from the confidence which the community will repose in you. In the old plays the clown was



always a doctor. Now the characters are changed, and we are allotted a more important and dignified *role*.

It does not comport with professional dignity, earnestness and method for the physician to enter the sick chamber and, throwing himself upon the sofa or lounge, to complain of over-fatigue from excess of care and responsibility. It is more than probable that one who is in this habit would lie both long enough and freely enough to disprove any great urgency of business. He may employ as many words, with as much adroitness as an auctioneer in getting rid of his wares, but sensible people will set their own value upon this surplus verbiage. The doctor degenerates into a clown when he plays clownish tricks, and Shakespeare advises to "Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down to them." If he assumes that the length of his visiting-list has deprived him of food and sleep for six days out of seven; that he travels from house to house and village to village, binding up the wounds and assuaging the anguish of hundreds daily; if his words imply that he has had four to six obstetric cases since you met him yesterday, or that he has no time for domestic duties or intra-professional courtesies, he may

be regarded a silly affected actor upon the stage of life, whose motives are perfectly transparent. Such an one may, however, succeed in amassing a fortune. The Spartan law of theft applauded the skilful pickpocket, and visited penalties only on the *maladroit* bungler who was discovered. The moral obliquity of the patient may lead him to sanction the shortcomings of his physician when it is his duty to rebuke them. If bank-credits and oil-stocks were the criterie of success in its broadest sense, one's whole effort might be spent in this direction. In this case, the method adopted would consist in magnifying, and making the most of the peculiarities and caprices of our patients. A brief term of servitude, a little time in which to adjust the machinery and to drill the well, would be amply sufficient.

While it would be wrong for you to make gain the sole end and design of your labors, and folly to sell your birth-right to a position of honor and usefulness for a mess of pottage, you should nevertheless methodize all your financial relations and responsibilities towards community. Collect your bills regularly. "The laborer is worthy of his hire." You will need to oil the machinery in order to prevent friction and mishap. The law of compensation

runs through all Nature. Its principles are based in right and justice between man and man. Your patients will feel more free to call upon you, and yourself more ready to serve them, if all former debts have been cancelled, and the choke-damp of obligation has been already dissipated. Moreover, this will afford you the means to obey the apostolic injunction "Owe no man anything." A skilful and experienced physician in debt is a paradox. Such a misfortune testifies of improvidence and a lack of method. There is no need of his being embarrassed.

If his district of practice will not afford him a "living," let him pitch his tent elsewhere. If he merits a good support, he should have it. Physicians are not the ornamental appendages of society that some persons would have us believe. Their function supplies a necessity of our nature. Physiologists tell us that air, water, food and light are chemical conditions requisite to health. A chief source of the welfare and prosperity of society lies in the support and confidence yielded to, and reposed in the good physician. It would not be agreeable to find your only motive for effort to save the life of a patient to hinge upon the fact of his owing you a few paltry dollars; neither to think that another might esti-



mate your professional worth by the amount of his claim against you. You will need the reward of your toil, and it should be ample enough to spare you the sin of meanness toward God, your neighbor, and yourself. An exchequer which is not subject to cramps and spasms contributes to cheerfulness and amiability of temper on the part of the physician. He is not half so liable to physical disabilities and indisposition if his purse is easy and somewhat corpulent, as if it were anæmic and atrophied. On the principle that one would be philosophical enough to ask a favor of a man who had enjoyed a good meal, and while his "wonderful digestive machinery was wound up and going," his patients might consult him in hope of sympathy and relief. The manner of its bestowal, as well as the quality of the advice given, would be improved by the tact displayed in eliciting it. It is as impolitic and short-sighted, not to say blame-worthy, for the doctor to suffer at the hands of those for whom he is able and willing to effect so much, as it would be for him to neglect his patients or to abuse his horse.

We have already observed that the methodical employment of his time yields the physician a margin for self-improvement. He consults his

authorities frequently, and keeps himself prepared for practical emergencies. He is not like those business-men who carry their memories in their pockets, and who are nothing without their memoranda. His mind is constantly refreshed, his mental resources are always available. But more than this, he makes his experience and his reflections of service to others. He wields a ready and a reliable pen. He cultivates the gift of communicating his ideas. No practical fact escapes him. His Index Rerum is crammed with data, his case-book with clinical observations. You shall always find him simmering over some therapeutical question, for his deductions are not drawn hastily nor carelessly. He writes much more than he consents to publish. His articles savor of age, as well as of experience. They are brief, comprehensive, well-digested, and embody much information. They are read with profit by the profession, who find them assimilable and available in every respect.

He is charitable and not given to harsh and unkind criticism, especially of the writings of our younger authors. This virtue is more and more developed with advancing age and increased experience. He will never be ranked among the "croakers," who do nothing themselves to

perfect the science, neither give credit to others for their labor—a class referred to by Cowper when he speaks of “skulls that cannot teach and will not learn.”

The virtue which we recommend also permits the physician to participate in the enjoyments and profits that spring] from association with other physicians. He connects himself with some medical society. He labors for the common weal. He makes it a point to be present at every meeting and to take part in its deliberations. By so doing he contributes his mite to the general advancement. He is a producer. He does not carry away more than he brought. When he begins to speak all are impressed with the conviction that his stores of experience are rich and varied. He has not hidden his talent in a napkin, neither does he consume the important time of the convention with dull, dry, dusty, common-place detail. His language is well-chosen, his expressions indicate culture, and the matter presented is pregnant with meaning. He is a nerve-centre in this professional body, and each word that falls assures you this presiding intelligence has not spent its resources unprofitably. The arc of influence centres in him. Its efferent influences

will reach to the limits of civilization, and the end of time.

Finally, his love of method is contagious. It constitutes a bond of sympathy between himself and all those who are engaged in pursuits that ennoble and elevate mankind. It inducts him into the fraternity and fellowship of those who

"Every morning with 'good day'  
Make each day good."

His example will be followed by the young and commended by the old. As by entertaining thoughts which are good and beneficent, we exclude from our minds those which are evil and mischievous; so by careful attention to the great business of his life the methodical physician fills up the measure of his time with good deeds that shall blossom and bear fruit when he has been called away. He exerts an influence that is not limited to the social or professional circle in which he moves. His liberality is known and read of all men. He spells no man backwards. His labors of life are redolent of health and of happiness. He is not a routinist, not an ascetic, but a plain, earnest and sensible physician, whose resources for good to others are doubled, and whose individual enjoyment is immeasurably augmented by a methodical and consistent course of life.





